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1-1-2012

Early Childhood: Three to Five

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Recommended Citation

Samuel, Javiette, "Early Childhood: Three to Five" (2012). *Cooperative Extension Faculty Research*. Paper 8.
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Cooperative Extension Program

*An Outreach Education Program Serving Limited
Resource Individuals, Families
and Communities*



Child Development Fact Sheet: 4HY-3

Early Childhood: Three to Five

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During early childhood, many children attend preschool where they have more opportunities to interact with peers; understand right from wrong; and develop the basis for making good decisions. They are beginning to build relationships; starting to see others' points of view; and beginning to understand the difference between boys and girls. They can also identify such feelings as anger, sadness, and happiness but adults need to help them find words to describe their feelings.

Social and Emotional Development: Feelings and Interaction

Because the number of relationships increase during the preschool years, children have more settings and opportunities to experience aggravation, conflict, and aggression. The most common form of aggression is instrumental aggression. Instrumental aggression is used to get an object, privilege, or space with no intent to harm another person. A child pushing a peer while trying to get to his or her favorite spot for story time is an example. Relational aggression is also common. This type is designed to negatively affect a relationship. A common way this is done is through withdrawing friendship. A typical comment is "I'm not your friend!"

Physical Development

The rapid growth patterns of infancy and toddlerhood decrease. Body fat declines. The torso becomes longer and slimmer and physical traits and body proportions start to resemble an adult.

Motor Development Gross and fine motor development is occurring rapidly and improves greatly during early childhood. Children can do a number of activities requiring the use of gross motor skills, or large muscle movement. This includes hopping, jumping, riding a tricycle, and throwing and catching a ball. Buttoning pants, zipping a jacket, and using scissors are types of activities that require use of fine motor skills, or small muscle movement. Drawing, coloring, putting puzzles together, and building structures are age-appropriate activities that help develop the fine motor skills in the hands and fingers.

Cognitive Development: Reasoning and Problem Solving

There is an increase in symbolic activity and recognition of symbols. For example, a child recognizes and says "stop" when he or she sees a stop sign; yet he or she cannot read the word. Most children can recite their full name, alphabet, body parts, colors, and shapes. Around four and five, they can talk about things from the past, for example a trip to the zoo and future events like birthdays or family vacations.

Play is one of the primary ways that children learn. Play and other activities that require using the mind and imagination help children think better and learn social skills. It also helps with such things as cooperation and relationship building. It encourages physical activity and enhances motor skills. In addition, it builds positive self-esteem, helps children learn from trial and error, and helps them learn adult roles and occupations.

Quick Facts

- Self-esteem and self-worth begin to develop during early childhood.
- Positive interactions with parents, significant adults and very important.
- Good experiences can help promote high self-esteem. Negative experiences will plant seeds of doubt and feelings of inferiority and worthlessness.
- Young children have the ability to stay active and to stay awake most of the day. They may refuse a nap even if they are tired.
- Many can recite and write the alphabet, their full name, address, and numbers.

References

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This *Child Development* Fact Sheet is part of a series prepared by the Cooperative Extension Program at Tennessee State University.

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TSU-05-005(A)-7e-533224

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The Extension Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

Printed by:

DocuTech Printing Service
Tennessee State University
Cooperative Extension Program
3500 John A. Merritt Blvd., Box 9635
Nashville, TN 37209-1561
615-963-7885

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